DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 265 259 UD 024 659

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TITLE The Role of Education in Reinforcing the Group Model in Japanese Society.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 16p.; In: Comparative and International Studies and the Theory and Practice of Education. Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Australian Comparative and International Education Society (11th, Hamilton, New Zealand, August 21-24, 1983). See UD 024 646.
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Role; Educational Environment; *Family Life; Foreign Countries; Groups; *Group Unity; *Self Concept; Socialization; *Social Systems; Sociocultural Patterns; Work Environment
IDENTIFIERS *Japan

ABSTRACT

Many attempts have been made to explain how modern Japan has, with speed and minimal stress, become competitive with Western nations in terms of military strength and industrial productivity. One factor commonly mentioned is the "groupishness," the collective orientation,that is basic to Japanese society. Some research has suggested that the Japanese tend to stress "frame" (referring to a locality, institution, or particular relationship) over "attribute" (relating to an individual's occupation), and that this modern tendency is a carryover from the traditional extended family. While this view of the Japanese as more group-oriented than other nationalities is debatable, most writers agree that the Japanese hold very strongly to family or tribal values. It is postulated that Japan is composed of networks of vertically linked groups displaying characteristics of group loyalites, and that today the groups center less around the family than they do around the workplace. Workers are educated in the ways of group responsibility and cohesion by their managers, foremen, training programs, and the schools. All of these contribute to the maintenance of the well-regulated, peaceful workforce that supports Japan's hierarchically structured society. Japanese life at school and work is permeated with activities and pressures that insist on harmonious personal relations. (KH)

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THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN REINFORCING THE GROUP MODEL IN JAPANESE SOCIETY

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Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Comparative and International Education Society (11th, Hamilton, New Zealand, 21-24 August, 1983).

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN REINFORCING THE GROUP MODEL IN JAPANESE SOCIETY

KEVIN COLLINS

INTRODUCTION

In 1868 Japan reacted to the forced opening of its ports by Western powers by initiating moves which it hoped would lead to rapid modernisation. Fearful of the changes which had been forced on China and other Asian countries, the Japanese leaders felt that the only way to maintain their sovereignty was to gain equality of power as rapidly as possible. To achieve this goal, the nation had to be changed from a semi-feudalistic society with little in the way of modern technology or industry, to one which could complete on equal terms with the Western nations in terms of military strength and industrial productivity, and it had to be completed as rapidly as possible to forstal any possible extraterratorial aspirations of the more developed countries. Another aspect which had to be considered by the Japanese leaders was the need to accomplish these objectives in such a way as to reduce the social stresses normally associated with modernisation thus causing as little disruption as possible to the industrial and economic activities being pursued by the government.

The extraordinary extent to which Japan achieved its objectives, the speed with which modernisation was accomplished, and, later, the recovery from the devastation of World War II, are known to all. What are still being examined and disputed about, however, are the mechanics which were used for these achievements. When one reflects on the fact that from 1868 to World War II Japan's average annual economic growth rate was approximately 3 per cent (among the highest in the world during that period), and that in the decade following the restoration of Japan's economy to pre-war levels (i.e. 1954), total production per capita tripled and manufacturing almost quadrupled, then it is understandable that a great deal of interest has been generated in analysing the causes of these developments.

A variety of factors have been put forward by scholars engaged in such research, but the majority of these factors would fall into one or other of the following categories: the governmental/enterprise relationship; the United States/Japanese relationship; the employer/

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employee relationship; the traditional/modern relationship; and the individual/group relationship. While the factors contained in each of these categories have contributed to Japan's industrial success, an examination of the categories suggests that one factor which appears in several of these categories is critical.

The important strength of the relationship between industry and government as characterised by the term "Japan Inc" has been stressed by researchers and disgruntled foreign competitors alike. Kahn put their case quite well when he stated that:

> The basic driving power (of postwar recovery) was a result of the effective utilisation of state power, of state financial organization, of state funding, and of the mobilization of other state-owned or controlled resources. All were used to support private enterprises in whatever ways needed. Even the original privately owned zaibatsu in the nineteenth century were begun by the government; the government started the business and then sold them at low prices to certain Samurai families.
>
> (Kahn 1971: 88)

One example of the benefits gained by government support quoted by Kahn was the way in which Japanese industry gained American technology at "bargain-basement rates" through the intervention of MITI (the Ministry of International Trade and Investment) (Kahn 1971: 80). Other well known examples of MITI involvement include the "required" formation of a consortium of major companies engaged in the microchip industry to combine research and development talent in an attempt to gain international leadership in the field. But the important point in this example, and others where MITI either allows inefficient or obsolete industries to go under, or controls selected industries by allocation of export subsidies, is that the selected companies or enterprises had to be able to survive on their own abilities and organisational procedures. These practices, basically predicated on good management, worker cooperation and productivity, parallel the relationships established prior to the Meiji Restoration, and which now form a "link between the institutions of the Tokugawa period and the 'groupishness' characteristic of workshop organization today" (Dore 1973: 381). In a similar way it can be shown that the benefits gained through its 'privileged' relationship with America would not have been possible if Japanese industry had not been both competitive and reliable - the

result of good management and employer/employee relationships.

The characteristic which appears to be common to each of the above relationships, and to be basic to Japanese society in general is the "groupishness" mentioned by Dore. This aspect of Japan is not something new which has recently developed, but, as has been mentioned by Dore and others, is something which has been apparent for centuries. Yoshino put it in the following way:

> Traditional Japan has often been characterized as a collectivity-oriented society. In fact, the individual hardly existed in it as a distinct entity. In every aspect of life, he was tightly bound to a group and had virtually no individual freedom. Indeed, the basic political, economic, and social unit in traditional Japan was the collectivity rather than the individual.
>
> (Yoshino 1968: 9)

While this stress on the collectivity existed prior to the Tokugawa period in the small, local farming communities, it became more pronounced during that period. The Tokugawa authorities preferred to work with groups, so they introduced procedures to further develop such an orientation as a measure for social control. In more recent times Vogel stated that the more he examinedthe "Japanese approach to modern organization, the business community, and the bureaucracy", the more he became convinced that character traits such as diligence and thrift had less to do with Japanese success than organizational structures such as the group (Vogal 1979: ix).

As almost everyone who has spent some time in Japan has seen and commented on incidents which they felt demonstrated group behaviour, whether it be groups of workers going off for drinks or dinner after work, office workers playing volleyball or baseball at lunch time, or the ubiquitous school excursions, this paper will examine more closely the 'group' model of Japanese behaviour, the extent to which it exists, and whether education plays any part in such examples as do exist.

THE GROUP MODEL

From the example already given by Yoshino the basic criteria involved in group behaviour, as distinct from individual behaviour, requires that the individual submerges his individuality to further

group goals, and group expectations. While this aspect of group behaviour is generally well known, other characteristics of Japanese group structure are less well known and will be examined now.

Nakane, in her analysis of Japanese society, categorises the contrasting modes of social configuration as either attribute (relating to his occupation) or frame (referring to a locality, institution, or particular relationship). Seen in the context of a person who has a particular occupation and lives in a specific community, when the occupation orientation is sufficiently strong that "an effective occupational group is formed which cuts across several villages; ... there is formed a distinct horizontal stratum which renders proportionally weaker the degree of coherence of the village community". Conversely, where the community cohesion is extemely strong, the links between those in occupational groups weaken (Nakane 1970: 24). The community was always the primary group for Japanese peasants, and the concept of a primary group persists today for the majority of Japanese. While there are many examples of people belonging to more than one group, there is always one major group which has top priority with the others being of lesser importance. The Japanese tendency to stress frame rather than attribute can be observed in the following example:

> ... when a Japanese "faces the outside" (confronts another person) and affixes some position to himself socially he is inclined to given precedence to institution over kind of occupation. Rather than saying "I am a type-setter" or "I am a filing clerk", he is likely to say, "I am from B Publishing Group" or "I belong to S Company". Much depends on context, of course, but where a choice exists he will use the latter form. ... In group identification, a frame such as a "company" or "association" is of primary importance; the attribute of the individual is a secondary matter.
>
> (Nakane 1970: 2)

To a large extent the modern group in Japan is based on the extended family in either the farming, craftsman or merchant concept of the pre-Meiji period. In this context immediate family, relatives, apprentices, and non-family workers were all considered part of "the family", and received food, accommodation, and were responsible to work for, and with, other "family members" for the benefit of all. Currently,

familialism, welfare services, housing schemes, recreation centres, and educational facilities are provided by large companies for their employees and their families. Befu (1971:49) describes this concept as ritual kinship because the members display kinship-type behaviour to each other although no actual kinship ties may exist. He perceives the essential features of the ritual kinship system as being:

1. Functional diffuseness and particularism which implies commitment to one's ritual kin simply because they are in this ritual relationship, and where interaction is not limited to work situations, but pervades their whole lives.
2. Hierarchical organisation.
3. Economic dependence.
4. Solidarity.
5. Symbolic expressions such as using ritual kinship terminology and other practices.

Whether one uses Nakane's familialism, Befu's ritual kinship, or Bennet and Ishino's paternalism (1963) the characteristics of the group involve hierarchical ranking, exchanging individual ambitions and behaviour for group goals and expectations, the gaining of security and support through group solidarity, striving for consensus rather than confrontation and disagreement, respect and deference given by junior members to senior group members which is reciprocated with concern and assistance for the juniors, and a general effort by all in the group to maintain group harmony and compete with other groups both within the same institution and outside it.

Although the majority of writers in this field tend to support the existence of the group model in Japanese society, Sugimoto and Mouer (1981: 10) feel that an increasing number of scholars are coming to doubt "whether, in comparison with people in other societies, the Japanese are more group-oriented, place more emphasis on consensus and social harmony, value more deeply group membership or social solidarity, or are more accustomed to 'vertical' forms of organisation". To support this view, they outlined the extent of research relating to conflict from the peasant rebellions in the Tokagawa era, through rural riots and disputes in the Meiji and Taisho periods, to the student protests, and the tensions between the Ministry of Education and the teachers' union in more recent times. However, in presenting these

examples of conflict and lack of harmony, they tended to ignore one of the basic aspects of group behaviour, in that harmony and lack of conflict within a group is balanced by competition, and sometimes conflict, between groups. The model of Japanese society as put forward by Nakane, Clark and others, is based on the concept that the society is composed of many groups, and of groups within groups, which if one accepts the "in-group" - "out-group" concept, allows for the types of conflict between groups mentioned by Sugimoto and Mouer. Whether Japanese are more group-oriented than people in other societies is possibly debatable, but Dore (1973: 297), in his study on Japanese and British workers, came to the conclusion that the "Japanese are lesser individualists, are more inclined to submerge their identity in some large group to which they belong, and (are) more likely to be obsessed by a sense of duty", while the British tend to be more selfish, irresponsible, and concerned with their personal rights and benefits. A recent study of American companies by Peters and Waterman (1982) found that in some companies group activities did occur, but the carryover of group behaviour into the social life of the working group members certainly did not happen to the same extent or intensity as that found in Japan.

A key to understanding why these differences exist has been suggested by Clark (1978). He contends that the Japanese have retained and developed the family-tribal values that characterise the origins of all societies, (e.g. group-centred, instinctive, and familial). In other words, Japan has managed to retain much of its pre-feudal/feudal identity and has not, as most other industrialised countries, developed an ideological society where principles, laws, and contracts replace personal relations as the binding agents for both groups and society.

> Even today the resemblance between modern Japanese values and the values of the family or tribal unit is striking. Individualism is subordinated to group interests. Consensus and commonality are stressed. Age and sex determine hierarchies. Religions are weakly developed. morality is group-centred and based on customs and conventions rather than universalistic ideologies. Situations and human relations have precedence over abstract laws and principles. Practical solutions are preferred to abstract theorizing. Feelings and instincts are important

> guides to action. Nor is it simply the values that are similar. In the structure of its society Japan remains essentially a collection of groups and sub-groups, held together by tight emotional, human-relations bonds.
>
> (Clark 1978: 3)

In psychological terms the ideological bias emphasises the intellectual dimension of the personality, or the ability to operate in terms of abstract concepts and principles. The instinctive, group-oriented approach emphasises the emotional side of the personality. This does not imply that non-Japanese have greater intellectual capacities than Japanese, but rather that it is "propensity, not ability" that is important. While we all possess both the intellectual and emotional dimensions, the cultural conditioning of the Japanese puts more emphasis on the emotional dimension in contrast to the intellectual bias common to those from the Western countries. Hanami (1981) found a similar dichotomy when comparing Western and Japanese models of industrial relations.

> Both types of industrial relations are based on different social and personal relationships: the independence of the individual and economic rationalism in the West and, in Japan, the existence of an emotional, perhaps sentimental, relationship between employer and employee within the enterprise.
>
> (Hanami 1981: 20)

Although only a sampling of opinions and research related to "groupism" in Japan has been presented here, the vast majority of scholars of both Japanese and non-Japanese origin tend to support the view that the Japanese are more group-oriented, and that the nature of the Japanese group is unique. Whereas groups in other societies are usually based on attribute, that is they are based on shared skills and beliefs (such as trade unions, religions, and castes) and are dependent on the principles or concepts which underlie them, Japanese groups are normally based on frame or location (i.e. X Company, Y University) and depend on human and emotional contact. While scholars with views conflicting with this notion of the unique Japanese group have pointed out quite validly that conflict has existed, and still exists today, this can in large part be answered by the "in-group" "out-group" concept which is a generally accepted aspect of Japanese society.

Another view they put forward is that "groupism" or the "group model" is an ideology propogated by the Japanese elite to both (a) control and mould the Japanese people through creating an "image of stability, harmony and consensus" (Sugimoto 1981: 16) in much the same way as described by Dore, and (b) to present a picture of Japanese society to their trading partners in an attempt to justify their policies and practices in industrial trade and marketing. This is a more difficult charge to answer as the Japanese Foreign Ministry has paid to have books such as Nakane's translated and distributed throughout Asian, European and American countries. It is possible to suggest, however, that while the Japanese elite do sponsor, and encourage qroupism, for their own ends, that this only reinforces the instinctive and emotional behaviour of the Japanese who still hold very strongly to family or tribal values.

Why does this emotional relationship, familialism or ritual kinship system develop to the extent it does in Japan? Clark (1978: 4) would say that people "instinctively identify" with the company or group where they work simply because of the fact that they work there. Woronoff (1982: 38) suggests that it is because the company selects only those applicants which it feels "can be moulded later to fit the company's needs". The emphasis is placed on the type of person wanted rather than on his abilities. Among the most desired characteristics are loyalty and harmony, and reminders of these characteristics appear in slogans and mottos, and are constantly referred to in speeches by company executives. Since most Japanese are more concerned with the prestige of the company they join than the actual position they gain in such a company, they are "willing to alter or hide their true feelings and adopt the outer shell their employer wants", in order to be selected and retained by the company. Gradually, over the years he becomes part of a growing circle of company employees all of whom adapt their personal styles through interaction at work, at the company canteen, at a nearby bar, having dinner together after work, or through living in company housing.

While in Japan in 1979, the writer interviewed companies such as Matsushita Electric (Pioneer, National, etc.), Sony, Toyota, N.E.C., Kawasaki Heavy Industries, and N.K.K. Steel, and was told in response to a question concerning selection criteria, that a major proportion of the

fairly extensive tests and interviews each applicant underwent was to determine whether he or she had the "correct" attitudes and behaviour to fit into the company. No matter how bright, or how good his reports or results, if it was felt that he was too individualistic and independent then he would be passed over in favour of an applicant who demonstrated cooperative attitudes, group-oriented behaviour, and diligence.

Various authors, such as Yoshino (1968) and Levine (1958) emphasise the vertical structure which forms such a basic part of Japanese social and work life. Levine stated that a "horizontal amalgamation of workers ran counter to traditions of vertical loyalties stemming from the age-old consanguinal family system and feudal relationships" (p.18). Yoshino discusses not only the vertical relationships within each group, but also the fact that a large corporation is composed of vertically linked "layers" of such groups (p.204), and that this linkage is replicated between company's and sub-contractors, and between large enterprises and small to medium sized firms.

Following this pattern to its logical conclusion then, it should be possible to postulate that Japan is composed of networks of vertically linked groups displaying characteristics of group loyalties; fierce competition between the "we-groups" and the "outsider groups"; subordination of personal goals, expectations, and working styles to the corresponding group norms; close human contact and relationships which spill over from the working environment in the members' social lives; and decisions being arrived at by consensus and discussions involving all members of the group. This, in fact, is what one will find in Japan, along with the strengths and weaknesses inherent in such a system, if one examines the employment system, particularly for males although women are becoming more involved in this pattern. With the work group being the primary group for so many, it is obvious that groups based on social linkages, or religion (which normally has quite weak affiliations except for such groups as the Sokka Gokkai movement), sporting groups, and to a large extent the family, are far less vital, dominating, and obvious, and play a much smaller role in Japanese society. The question remaining to be answered is why have the groups in the working environment become so dominant.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN GROUP DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE

From the points raised in the foregoing discussion it would appear that while the group approach was probably a natural development in small rural areas of Japan in the early and feudal periods, and may still be a natural outgrowth of the instinctive, emotional nature of the Japanese, there have been very deliberate attempts throughout Japan's history up to the present time to encourage and reinforce such a development. Dore (1973) certainly suggests such a situation when he describes the creation of a work-gang system in 1882.

> From five to fifteen workers were grouped in relatively permanent work-groups under a foreman leader who was "to be himself a model of correct behaviour, to guide and exhort the members of his group in accordance with the orders of his superior, to make sure that they obey the regulations, to admonish them when they are in error, and to unite them in earnest industrial endeavour". ... What is clear is its roots in Japanese culture - in the moralism of the passage quoted, and in another of the twenty-one articles of the work-group rules which stated: "any shirking, misconduct or breaking of the regulations by any member of the group shall be considered the responsibility not only of the individual concerned, but of the group as a whole". Here was a creative application to industry of an old method of political control long familiar in China and Japan and institutionalized in seventeenth-century Japan ... Here, then, is a link between the institutions of the Tokugawa period and the "groupishness" characteristic of workshop organization today. (1973: 381).

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In this example Dore presents us with a case where the workers are "educated" in the ways of group responsibility and cohesion. A similar statement could be made about the mutual responsibility of work groups today, but to a large extent it would not be necessary to set out similar guidelines since these expectations are now accepted as normal; an indication of the effectiveness of this aspect of the education process. The stress at the present time is placed on the Japanese manager to cultivate harmony and solidarity within his group, or as stated by Pascale and Athos (1981: 126), the "group's harmony, and spirit are the main concern". As the work group is the basic building block of Japanese organisations, then it can be projected further to claim that Japanese management is basically concerned with maintaining the harmony

and spirit of their individual workforces as they compete for a greater proportion of the domestic and export market. Even the "oyabun" or foreman, who has been excluded from the managerial process of decision-making, has as one of his major functions "to reinforce his group's self discipline, already inherently strong as a result of commonly held cultural values, customs, and language" (Levine 1958: 57).

Reischauer (1965: 135) would support Dore's views, particularly the concept of political control of the population. He felt that the Tokugawa regime deliberately supported Confucian philosophy which was concerned with correct observance of social relationships in a hierarchically structured society, because it provided the very emotional Japanese with "the external controls they required to form a well-regulated, peaceful society". If one accepts that Japan is a hicrarchically structured society, then Japanese management is still engaged in moulding or educating behaviour to ensure that a "well-regulated, peaceful" workforce exists. While much of their efforts are directed to group formation, maintenance, and harmony, most companies also provide specific reinforcement through their training programs. Some of the personnel and training officers interviewed during 1979 and 1983 admitted that the technical/informational content of the short courses might sometimes be fairly small, but that a major objective was to re-stimulate selected workers who would then, it was hoped, help to stimulate their work groups.

Schools also play an integral part in the developing of group behaviour. While a lot of attention is paid to the fierce competition for places in the hierarchy of Japanese universities, and concern continues because of the number of school students who attend coaching classes outside school hours, the competition is usually seen as being between the student and the particular entrance exam, rather than between students; or could even be between students from one school and the students from other schools. Vogel (1979: 28) sees study as a social activity which should continue throughout life.

> **By the time Japanese youth complete formal schooling, not only have they acquired general information, but they have acquired the habit of studying in groups. Even if they read alone, they discuss their reading with peers.**

The close relationship of a student to his peers at school, to his family and to his teachers, strongly motivates him to study so that he will not only gain personal status and success, but that he will not disappoint them or let them down.

> The motivation for achievement through examinations is increased by the tight-knit membership of a variety of groups. Families are, in a sense, competing with other families, and the child's success in examinations is seen as directly reflecting on a family's success.
>
> (Vogel 1979: 165)

In much the same way, classes within a school also compete with other schools, with great stress being placed on individual and school success.

The closeness within school groups will develop partially from continual interaction over the twelve years spent at school as it would in most countries, but it is also fostered.

> Through group projects, group trips, classroom organization, and above all through close-knit activity clubs with membership lasting several years the student is not only allowed to enjoy group life but taught to be sensitive to his peers and to restrain personal egoism. Indeed, student organizations themselves play a major role in advising a student about ways to gain the respect of his peers. This prepares the student for life in a modern organization, where he is expected to develop a long-range commitment to work peers and to be considerate of them.
>
> (Vogel 1979: 178)

Even areas of the curriculum, such as Moral Education, ensure the acquisition of desirable attitudes and behaviour by discussing personal interaction, responsibility to others, the benefits of cooperation, and other similar aspects of behaviour selected to be emphasised in the program.

Although the basic goals of education as expressed by the Ministry of Education, and the actual practice of what happens in schools are not necessarily the same, it is interesting to note a couple of comments expressed in the Ministry guidelines for reform in 1972.

> As men leading a social life, we should establish a variety of human relations and actively participate in social activities. Through these we acquire the consciousness of social solidarity, responsible attitudes and behaviouralabilities which enable us

> to realize not only our own goals but also to aid others in their efforts. (p.3)
>
> Direction of Improvement of School Education
> (b) The improvement of such methods of education as group activities so as to promote the development of sociability, and to create a classroom situation where individual students can be provided with appropriate guidance and counselling. (p.6)
>
> In addition the classes composed of various types of students must be handled so that the educational function of group life is not impaired. (p.14).

With these objectives being brought clearly to the attention of teachers throughout Japan, it is not difficult to see how the examples of school group activities mentioned previously by Vogel came into being.

When one reviews the varying factors which support group formation it is clear why group behaviour has persisted for so long. Ranging from the instinctive behaviour of the individuals, the familiarity of groupism at work within the family and the community at large, the group activities which permeate school life from kindergarten through to graduation from senior high school and even university, the selection procedures for employment, the reiterated and overt stress on group behaviour and harmony presented by employers, and the lifelong education patterns provided by employers, these activities constantly encourage and reinforce acceptance of, and adherance to, group behaviour as a means of gaining personal goals and the satisfaction of contributing to the success of one's company. It is difficult, however, not to ponder on the future of groups and group behaviour if the companies/employers ceased to make so obvious their desire for group-oriented employees, so that only such aspects as Clark's "instinctive" behaviour, and normal family and community values reamined to support their continuance. Would schools still place so much stress on fostering group activities if employers no longer wanted those skills and characteristics in their future employees? If Brown (1974: 186) was accurate when he said that:

> It is precisely the group-orientation of the members, the cohesion, and the insistence on harmonious personal relations which, I submit, are the strength of Japanese organizaions and the source of their efficiency.

then it is doubtful that schools or society will want to reorder their expectations in the near future.

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